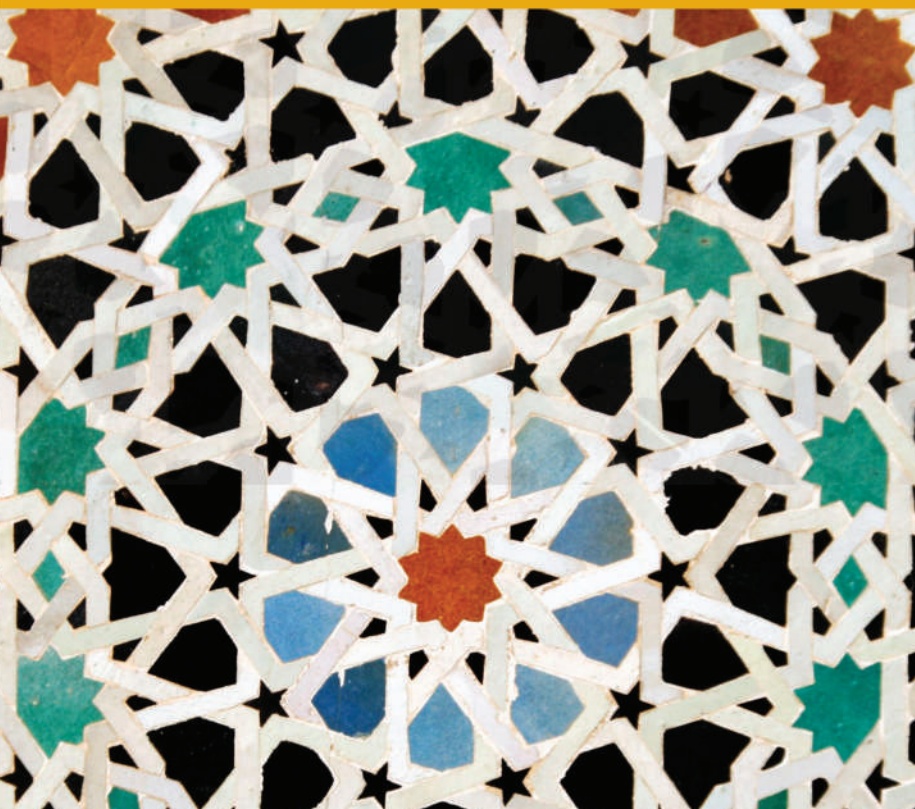


Discover Islam

A CASE OF DISCOVERY

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*In the name of Allah
The Merciful, the Compassionate*

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Introduction

This booklet comprises a lecture which was delivered by Dr. Nishikant Chattopadhyaye in 1904, in Hyderabad. He belonged to a well-known Bengali family, which earned much fame and popularity, as one of its family members, Sarojini Naidu, daughter of Agornath Chattopadhyaye, played an eminent role in the freedom struggle.

This family migrated from Bengal to settle in Hyderabad during the British Period. One of its learned members was Dr. Nishikant Chattopadhyaye, who also made this migratory journey. Well-versed in several languages, he was a true seeker in the real sense of the word. He studied religion and its related disciplines in detail. Finally he became fully convinced of the veracity of Islam. Having found the answer to his quests he embraced the true faith. After his acceptance, he delivered a lecture on the 26th August 1904, at the historic Fateh Maidan in Hyderabad. That same year Luzac & Sons printed this lecture, one copy of which is still extant in the British Museum in London. It was later reprinted in 1971 from a copy

found by Mr Hasanuddin Ahmad of Hyderabad in the library of Mirza Abul Fazl, also of Hyderabad.

Dr. Nishikant Chattopadhyay was Principal of Hyderabad College and Professor of History at the Maharaja College, Mysore. He was born in mid-nineteenth century in Bengal and died in the first quarter of the 20th century in Hyderabad. His Muslim name after conversion was Mohd. Azizuddin.

The nineteenth century was the century of the knowledge explosion. Man came to feel that, under the influence of science, the attainment of boundless knowledge was within his reach, and that he was now in a position to build his world on his own. However, by the end of this century the picture was quite different. It was discovered with great frustration that science can give but a partial knowledge of reality. And limited knowledge is an insufficient basis on which to construct an ideology that will provide answers to all his questions. The first phase—of hope—was outlined in a book written by the British author, Julian Huxley: *Man Stands Alone*. The second phase—of frustration—found expression in a book written by the American author, Cressy Morrison. Its title: *Man does Not Stand Alone* was truly meaningful.

But again there was the thrilling news brought by the twentieth century: that of the atomic explosion. Man believed once again that he had managed to acquire the greatest power of nature; now the time

had come for the first time in human history to build the most successful civilization on earth.

Events showed, however, that atomic power, having assumed the form of the atomic bomb, became a source of such great destruction as to threaten the very existence of human civilization.

The truth is that prior to the knowledge explosion, or the atomic explosion, man has been in need of a reliable ideology to furnish him with a complete interpretation of life, and instruct him as to the goal of his existence and the direction of his actions and how to exercise knowledge and power. The spread of communism in the nineteenth century had given man the false conviction that he had discovered the perfect ideology that he had been seeking all along. But, in 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, this false sense of conviction vanished into thin air. In this new scenario, the world is experiencing an ideological vacuum. Islam alone can fill this vacuum for it is a religion of nature—a complete and preserved guidebook handed down by God to His Prophet.

The trend of studying Islam all over the world shows that this process has already begun and the twenty first century will be the century of Islam. If the nineteenth century was marked by the knowledge explosion and the twentieth century by the atomic explosion, the twenty first century is destined to be marked by the Islamic explosion.

The fact is that, for the building of life, man is in need of divine guidance. Religion is the name of this divine guidance. And Islam is the only preserved and reliable version of religion. Just as there is no source of physical light save that of the sun, similarly there is no other source of divine guidance for life except that of Islam. Islam is the only reliable, authentic and dependable answer to this question.

Man, born to live on the planet earth, has been endowed with free choice, but he is not the master of his destiny. The most crucial aspect of life is that he is accountable to God Almighty for all his deeds. There is no escape from this accountability. After a brief span on earth, he is destined to face his death and find himself before God for his fate to be decided in the form of eternal hell or eternal paradise. The greatest of man's concerns is that he should prepare himself for the world to come. The present world is like a great examination hall, where man's only task is to pass the divine test set by God, so that he may save himself from divine punishment in the next world, and be held deserving of God's rewards in the form of paradise. In paradise there will be no fear and no regret.

Everyone is heading towards a fateful leap into the next world. Only those who can pass the divine test are the successful ones in this life and the next. This is the goal towards which people ought to strive. (Qur'an 37:60).

A Case of Discovery

It is a trite saying, that the present can be fully grasped and appreciated only by a due reference to the past. In order, therefore, to set before you clearly the reasons that have induced me to accept Islam in preference to the other great religions of the world, it is necessary that I should give you a short sketch of the various phases of doubt and faith through which I have passed from my boyhood upwards to the present day.

Having lost faith early in that strange and heterogeneous medley of animism, fetishism, polytheism and pantheism, known as popular Hinduism, I have been in search of a truer faith from my very boyhood. Naturally enough, I soon came in contact with the Brahmo Somaj and Christianity, then engaged in an apparently bitter conflict for obtaining mastery over the minds of the young Bengal. The star of Babu Keshab Chandra Sen was in the ascendant, and I still recollect the thrill of fervour and enthusiasm with which I used to pour over some of his eloquent sermons and discourses. The Brahmo Somaj introduced me to some of the great Unitarians of England and of America, notably to Theodore Parker of Boston, whom I began to regard as a prophet and an apostle of God. I became so exceedingly fond

of his works that it was my habit in those days always to carry a volume or two of Theodore Parker's books with me wherever I happened to go, and to quietly read them over as others do the Bible or the Quran. In this state of mind, I shipped myself off to Europe for the sake of my education. Arriving in Scotland, I soon got into the society of some good Christian men and women of an orthodox type, who began to take great interest in me, and to express great concern for the salvation of my soul. I used to visit their houses and join in their prayer-meetings. Once or twice I even attended some of the revivalistic meetings then in vogue, and was greatly surprised to see strong, bearded men bitterly weeping for their sins, while scores of delicately-framed old spinsters were carried away in fainting fits. The emotional side of the Scotch character of which we see so little in India, now stood revealed before me in a most unequivocal manner. But however deep and genuine my love and reverence for Christ was, however sincere my admiration for the general drift of his essential teachings, I could by no means reconcile myself to two items of the orthodox creed: (1) Atonement, and (2) Eternal Damnation. There was also a Unitarian chapel in Edinburgh that I occasionally attended, and though their religious views and mine were very similar in some respects, yet the general tone of the sermons delivered there was somewhat too cold and

sometimes too rationalistic for my warm, oriental blood. In Edinburgh, I fell in with the writings of Thomas Carlyle, who inspired me not only with a genuine love for German literature but also with a real admiration for Luther, Goethe and Schiller. I began to study German in right earnest, and quietly made up my mind to visit that great country which had produced such a grand literature and given birth to such truly heroic souls as mentioned above. The east winds of Edinburgh which ill-suited my naturally delicate constitution, gave me a further plea, and I soon transhipped myself over to Leipzig with a determination to study science, literature and philosophy in the academic halls of that world-renowned University where Lessing and Goethe had finished their studies a century ago. As I was interested in biology and was soon greatly attracted by the Darwinian Theory of Evolution, which was then creating a tremendous ferment all over the German Fatherland, I soon read most of the writings of Buchner and Hackel, of Darwin and of Huxley and above all, of Herbert Spencer. Herbert Spencer had made a practical application of the Evolution Theory to religion and politics, art and society; in other words, to all the multifarious branches of human thought and feelings, and had done so with such a rare vigour of intellect and such an exuberant wealth of illustrations, that I began to consider him

as the greatest philosopher that the world had ever produced since Plato and Aristotle, and his Evolution Theory in its practical bearings as the Gospel of the future church of mankind. This Theory of Evolution had, after all, solved all difficulties and set all doubts at rest!

Here was an indisputable *terra firma* on which to build the future superstructure of all human thought and speculation! Did it not account for so many things that were otherwise quite mysterious! True, but it left very little room for the existence of an Almighty, all-knowing and all-good, personal God, for the need of prayer, or for the “hypothesis” of a life after Death where men are to be held responsible for their thoughts, words and deeds. In this manner, I became a Positivist of the schools of Auguste, Comte and an Agnostic of the school of Huxley, both at the same time, and was in a very suitable frame of mind to intensely enjoy reading books like Strauss’s “The Old and the New Faith” and John Stuart Mill’s “Three Essays on Religion” and particularly his charming “Autobiography.” Studying some of the German philosophers and especially Arthur Schopenhauer, who was then the *philosophe a la mode* in the student circles of Germany, I soon became a convert to Buddhism which, in its earliest scriptures, inculcates a lofty ethical code minus

supernatural sanctions, and a Religion of Humanity minus distinctions of caste, creed and country; Halloa! I had after much wandering found the very religion I was in need of quite close to my own native land, since Buddha had chiefly lived and worked at Gaya and Rajagriha which were anciently included in Bengal and are just now situated on the very borders of the same. I got so exceedingly fascinated with the creed of Lord Buddha that I not only read all the books on Buddhism in English and German that I could lay my hands on, but even learnt Pali to be able to translate a portion of the *Milinda Prasana* in vindication of the right meaning of the Nirvana as I then conceived it to be. Professor Max Muller's interpretation, which amounted to the same things, was subsequent to mine. Within a short time I was asked by my German friend to deliver a few lectures on Buddhism, which created quite a flutter in all the clerical and orthodox circles of Germany, inasmuch as in comparing my ideal Buddhism with a very orthodox form of Christianity then in vogue, I had given an unquestionably higher place to Buddhism. These two lectures on "Buddhism and Christianity" were printed, read and criticized all over the country and I had even the gratification of seeing one of them (The Second *Karma*) translated into English and published by the Free Thought Society of London

then under the high auspices of Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant. When after some 12 years I met Mrs. Besant in Hyderabad for the first time, we were both Theosophists. But the inherent pessimism of Buddhism did not appeal to me at all and I soon grew tired of it. Every limb of my body and every faculty of my soul was quivering and aching, as it were, for work and enjoyment, and here was a system of philosophy enjoining on me to deny some and to entirely suppress others of the most natural instincts and emotions of my youth and adolescence. There must be something morbid and radically wrong in a system and a creed that goes against our Human Nature.

When I was passing through this phase of my spiritual life, I had to go, in the first place, to Paris and then a year later on to St. Petersburg. In Paris I soon became quite familiar with the French language which I had already begun to study in Leipzig. French opened altogether, a new world to me. It gave me, so to say, a new soul. I began to study and take delight in the works of Moliere and Racine, Voltaire and Victor Hugo, Renan and Taine. And quite particularly Voltaire, who appeared and still appears to me the greatest literary genius that the world has ever produced. But the works of Voltaire, though they immensely tickled and amused me,

served only to make me a more confirmed sceptic than ever. The forty volumes of his *Oeuvres completes* which range over almost all subjects of human thought and feeling had, however, the effect of laughing me, for good, out of my German gaucherie and Buddhistic pessimism. The influence of Renan, though sceptical, was far more ethical and artistic. His "La Vie de Jesus" (Life of Jesus) is one of the best books I have ever read, deeply impressing me with its poetical style and moral earnestness. Renan led me to take an interest in Semitic religions and in Semitic languages. The works of Max Muller, with which I had been very familiar for several years, had already taught me how to study languages and religions from a scientific standpoint. Renan only continued what Max Muller had already begun, and I threw myself, heart and soul, into the comparative study of all the great religions of the world, to wit: Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Brahminism on the one hand, and Buddhism, Christianity and Islam on the other. Christianity for some time appeared to me as the culminating point and the true reconciliation of the Semitic and the Aryan; and I might have become a convert to Roman Catholicism some years ago but for the dogmas of papal infallibility, transubstantiation and so on, which my German university education had rendered untenable. Nevertheless, I was greatly impressed by Roman Catholicism on its artistic and

archaeological side and I am still of the opinion, that there is no form of Christianity that affords greater consolation or offers a surer haven to a weary soul tossed for years on the tempestuous seas of modern scepticism, than the Church dedicated to St. Peter in Rome. In this frame of mind I returned to India, and was soon confronted with Theosophy as one of the leading movements of the day. When I was in the service of the late Nawab Sir Viqarul Umarah Bahadur, I was once agreeably surprised to receive through the Nawab Saheb himself the following three books as gifts: (1) Arnold's "Light of Asia." (2) Sinnet's "Occult World" and (3) "Esoteric Buddhism." Who the donor actually was, whether a Tibetan Mahatma or a friendly English book-seller, whence the books really came, whether from the monasteries of Lhasa or from the bookstalls of London I have not yet been able to discover, but the books were very useful and interesting reading for some months to come. I soon came in contact with some of the leading apostles of Theosophy and read all their books and pamphlets with great zeal. Theosophy soon revived my old interest in the comparative study of religion, and I now threw myself with special earnestness into the study of Islam and of Zoroastrianism which I had somewhat neglected before. My studies in the old Parsee religion culminated in a lecture on "Zoroastrianism" which was so well appreciated

by those for whom it had been intended, that it was printed in a nice pamphlet form under the auspices of the Parsee Panchyat of Bombay. My Islamic studies, for which besides the particular environment of Hyderabad, I had ample resources placed at my disposal in the library of the late Maulvi Cheragh Ali, and that of Mr Syed Ali Bilgrami now in England, brought me into contact with a religion so simple and intelligible, so reasonable and practical, that I should have taken the step I have lately taken some 10 years ago, had not an untoward incident forced me to publish a contradiction in the public journals and to leave Hyderabad altogether for some years. But it was evidently not in the counsels of that all-wise and all-merciful Providence who guides and controls everything, that I should have made this public profession of Islam earlier than I have done. Otherwise I should certainly have done so: He whom Allah guides is rightly guided; but he whom He leaves in error shall find no friend to guide him. (18:17) However, it is better late than never. God is my witness, I have accepted Islam in all sincerity and earnestness, and the first reason that has moved me to do so *is its solid, historical groundwork*. After wandering helplessly for several years in the marshy bogs of divergent creeds and conflicting systems of philosophy, with only the will-o-the-wisp of speculative reason to serve me

as a guide, my weary soul has at last found refuge and consolation in a religion based on a Revelation that has remained unaltered ever since its first compilation under the first Caliph, and in a creed that acknowledges as its Prophet of God, one whose historical personality is not only unquestionable but about whose youth, appearance, daily habits and even personal characteristics we know almost as much as we do about those of Oliver Cromwell or of Napoleon Bonaparte. You may slander or revile him if you choose, as so many Christian and other writers have done for centuries, but you can't throw even the least shadow of doubt on the historical basis of that immense personality that has stamped itself so deep on the rolls of Time as to make Christendom grow pale before that august and illustrious name even to this day. But Christendom need not grow pale at all. If it only knew his life and character as it really was—so noble, so genuine and withal, so loveable, Christendom would admire, honour and love him as all Muslims do. In the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ there is nothing vague and shadowy, mythical or mysterious, as, for instance, in Zoroaster and Sreekrishna, or even in Buddha and Christ. The very existence of those Prophets has been seriously doubted and even totally denied; but nobody, as far as I am aware, has ever ventured to reduce the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ either into a “Solar myth” or into a “fairy tale” as

some eminent savants of Europe have done with Buddha and Christ. Oh! What a relief to find, after all, a truly historical Prophet to believe in!

As for the Quran, it is not a mere heterogeneous compilation of a wilderness of stories and chronicles, of Prophetic rhapsodies and of poetical biographies, produced at widely different periods and by widely divergent men, and thrown into one single mould nobody exactly knows when and how; but it is, on the contrary, one single Book bearing the indelible impress of one great Soul to whom God in His mercy has chosen to reveal it. There is such a marvelous continuity and uniformity running throughout the whole Book, that no impartial critic or fair-minded reader can ever doubt either its sincerity or authenticity. You may call it tedious or monotonous, if you like, you may even point out some of its apparent discrepancies, but you cannot deny its being exactly the same book as that which was revealed to the Holy Prophet during his life-time at different periods and on different occasions ever since that memorable night of the 27th Ramadan (*Lailatul Qadr*) when the angel Gabriel stood before him and said:

Read, in the name of your Lord, who created,
created man from clots of congealed blood.
Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One,
Who taught man by the Pen, Who taught man

what he knew not! Indeed, man transgresses in thinking himself self-sufficient. Verily to your Lord is the return. (96: 1-8)

This historical groundwork of Islam has struck even such a sceptic as Ernst Renan who in his “Etudes d’Histoire Religieu” (pp. 220, 230) makes some very pertinent remarks about it. Professor Bosworth Smith holds similar views and expresses himself in the following terms in his famous lectures on “Muhammad and Islam.” “We know indeed, some fragments of a fragment of Christ’s life; but who can lift the veil of thirty years that prepared the way for the three? ... But in Islam everything is different; here, instead of the shadowy and the mysterious, we have history. We know as much of Muhammad as we do even of Luther and Milton. The mythical, the legendary, the supernatural is almost wanting in the original Arab authorities, or at all events, can easily be distinguished from what is historical. Nobody here is the dupe of himself, or of others; there is the full light of day upon all that light can ever reach at all..... In the Quran, we have beyond all reasonable doubt the exact words of Muhammad without subtraction and without addition. We see with our own eyes the birth and adolescence of a religion” (pp. 17, 18, 22). And the last but not the least, Carlyle in his famous book: “Heroes and Hero Worship” has stated the following about the Quran: “When once you get

this Quran fairly off, the essential type of it begins to disclose itself: and in this there is merit quite other than the literary one. If a book came from the heart, it will contrive to reach the hearts: all art and authorcraft are of small amount to that. One would say, the primary character of the Quran is that of its genuineness, of its being a bona-fide book. Sincerity in all senses seems to me the merit of the Quran.”

The next reason that has induced me to accept Islam is, that it is so eminently reasonable. In Islam, we haven't got to believe in Thirty-nine Articles bristling with dogmas that are either unintelligible to our ordinary reason or inconsistent with our common sense. All that we have to do, is to declare our sincere faith in one simple formula called *kalima*: *La ilaha illallah, Muhammadur rasullullah*, that is to say, “There is no diety save Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet.” Nay, there is a well-known *Hadith* which distinctly says that even “he who believes only in one God will go to heaven,” or in other words is a Muslim (*Man Qala la ilaha illallah fa dakhala jannah!*). And is there any human being, from the poorest beggar to the most highly exalted Prince, from the most ignorant poor to the most highly cultured philosopher, who can refuse his sincere adherence to the Unity of God? Every sound and normal man with his human institutions not perverted either by false philosophy or gross depravity, every man,

I say, who is not a hopeless atheist or an inveterate agnostic, must readily give his assent to that simple and sublime truth: The Unity of God. All the greatest philosophers of ancient as well as modern times have enunciated it in some shape or other, while saints, apostles and prophets, whose names are so deeply enshrined in the sacred altars of collective humanity, have lived and died for it. What is the verdict of our modern Science on the Unity of Being?, that is to say, the Unity of both force and of matter which compose that Being. Dr. J.C. Bose's recent researches have only scientifically demonstrated what apostles and prophets have invariably and persistently proclaimed ever since the days of Adam and Noah, Abraham and Moses. In Islam, we are not asked to believe in three gods-in One as in the Athanasian creed, or in thirty millions of gods and goddesses as in popular Hinduism, but only in that one great Being who is the Creator of the Universe, who is all-knowing and all-wise and who is, at the same time, also the most merciful and the most compassionate: "Your God is one God; there is no God but He, the Most Merciful. In the creation of the Heavens and Earth, and the alternation of night and day, and in the ships that sail the ocean, laden with what is profitable to mankind, and in the rain and the water which God sends from Heaven, quickening again dead earth, and the animals of all sorts which cover

its surface, and in the movements of winds and the clouds balanced between heaven and earth are signs to people of understanding; Yet there are some who worship other objects besides Allah, bestowing on them the adoration due to Allah.” (2: 164-65).

As to the second part of the kalima, it is not a “necessary fiction” as Gibbon chooses to call it, but a very necessary and highly valuable truth consistent with reason, and appealing to the highest aspirations of our spiritual life. Whenever the fundamental truths, on which our moral and religious life is based, are either obscured or forgotten, whenever men become too worldly and avaricious, too immoral and materialistic, there appear, in the history of races and nations, men so highly spiritualised by birth and breeding as to be called prophets and apostles of God, and whose sole mission in life is to remind men of what they have forgotten and to revive what they have lost. “I am no more than a public preacher. I preach nothing new. I only try to bring home to you certain eternal truths proclaimed by all true prophets of God which you have evidently forgotten.” This is being constantly repeated in the Quran. And that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was all that he claimed to be, namely a Prophet of God in the highest sense of that word, will be evident to all fair-minded men, unbiased by missionary or sectarian prejudices, who take the trouble to study his life and teachings and

particularly the Quran which has been called the “autobiography of Muhammad.” All the Traditions represent him as uncommonly true and just, liberal and generous, good and pure. He has been the beau ideal of a Perfect Man to one-third of our race for the last 13 centuries. It is absurd to suppose, that “a wicked impostor” as Christian writers commonly represent him to be, should have had that immense and abiding influence on such vast masses of men for such a long time as Muhammad. After all, Carlyle’s dictum, contained in his lecture on “Heroes and Hero-worship” which I have already referred to, will be found to be true:

“This deep-hearted son of the wilderness with his beaming black eyes, and open, social, deep soul had other thoughts in him than ambition. A silent, great soul, he was one of those who cannot but be in earnest; whom nature herself has appointed to be sincere. While others work in formulas and hearsays, contented enough to dwell therein, this man could not screen himself in formulas: he was alone with his whole soul and the reality of things. The great mystery of existence glared upon him with its terrors, with its splendours; no hearsays could hide that unspeakable fact, ‘Here am I.’ Such sincerity as we named it has, in truth, something of the divine. The word of such a man is a voice direct from nature’s own heart. Men must listen to that, or to nothing else; all else is wind

in comparison. From of old, a thousand thoughts in his pilgrimages and wanderings had been in this man ‘What am I ?’ ‘What is Life?’ ‘What is Death?’ ‘What am I to believe?’ ‘What am I to do?’ The grim rocks of Mount Hira, or Mount Sinai, the stern, sandy solitude answered not. The great Heaven rolling silently overhead with its blue glancing stars, answered not. There was no answer. The man’s own soul and what of God’s inspirations dwelt there, had to answer!”

These two fundamental principles, whose profession makes a man a Muslim, are thus based on the highest dictates of our intuitive reason. This has been admitted even by Christian writers such as Edward Montet who, in his book called “*La propaganda chretienne et ses adversaires Mussalmans*” has written the following: “Islam is a religion that is essentially rationalistic in the widest sense of this term, considered etymologically and historically. The definition of rationalism as a system that bases religious beliefs on principles furnished by the reason, applies to it exactly. To believers, the Muslim creed is summed up in belief in the Unity of God and in the mission of His Prophet, statements that, to the religious man rest on the firm basis of reason. This fidelity to the fundamental dogma of the religion that has been proclaimed with a grandeur, majesty, and an invariable purity and with a note of sure

conviction which it is hard to find surpassed outside the pale of Islam, the elemental simplicity of the formula in which it is enunciated, the proof that it gains from the fervid conviction of the missionaries who propagate it, are so many causes to explain the success of Muslim missionary efforts. A creed so precise, so stripped of all theological complexities and, consequently, so accessible to the ordinary understanding, might be expected to possess and does indeed possess a marvellous power of winning its way into the consciences of men.” (pp. 17-18)

The third reason why I have accepted Islam is, that it is so thoroughly practical. Its ethical code is based on the actual needs of human nature, and not on some imaginary or exaggerated standard of virtue which is unattainable. The standard set up by other religions, for example, by Buddhism and Christianity might, in a certain sense, be called loftier or more transcendental; but is it possible to realise it in actual life? The test by which an ethical code is to be judged is not its poetical beauty, but its practical utility, by its complete adaptation to the needs and requirements of our human nature as it is. As Emerson has beautifully put it: “Sirius may be loftier than the Sun, but it does not ripen my grapes!” We may admire Quixotic perfections in novels and romances, but they are utterly useless in the struggles of our everyday life. We may admire, for

example, the poetic excellence of the precept: “When thy brother smites thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the left also,” but does any Christian, good, bad or indifferent, ever practise it? Take again the doctrines of celibacy and marriage. Both Buddhism and Christianity, though they tolerate marriage, yet exalt celibacy as a higher virtue. Islam does not tolerate celibacy at all, but, on the contrary, enjoins matrimony as a religious duty binding on every true Muslim.

This system of universal matrimony, joined to occasional polygamy amongst the wealthier classes, makes it, that there is almost a total dearth in Muslim countries of those professional out-castes such as you invariably come across in such shockingly large figures in the streets of London and Paris, Vienna and St. Petersburg. Canon Isaac Taylor, a dignitary of the Anglican Church, had the courage to deliver himself in the following manner before a Church Congress held at Wolverhampton on the 7th October 1887: “Muhammad limited the unbounded license of polygamy; it is the exception rather than the rule in the most civilized Muslim lands—European Turkey, Algiers and Egypt. Polygamy, with all its evils, has its counterbalancing advantages. It has abolished female infanticide and gives every woman a legal protector. Owing to polygamy, Muslim countries are free from professional outcasts, a greater reproach to

Christendom than polygamy to Islam. The strictly regulated polygamy of the Muslim is infinitely less degrading to women and less injurious to men than the promiscuous polyandry which is the course of Christian cities and which is absolutely unknown in Islam. The polyandrous English are not entitled to cast stones at polygamous Muslims. Let us first pluck out the beam from our own eye, before we meddle with the mote in our brother's eye." Now, which matrimonial code, do you think, is more practical, more consonant to the actual needs of human society and more conducive to its highest development from a moral and spiritual point of view? I could bring forward other moral precepts of Islam and, contrasting them with those of other great religions of the world, point out how in each case there is in Islam a far more harmonious blending of practical wisdom and spiritual insight than anywhere else. But that would lead me too far and demand a separate lecture by itself. For this occasion I shall only content myself by quoting the following passage from Amir Ali's famous book, *The Spirit of Islam*: "The practical character of a religion, its abiding influence on the common relations of mankind, in the affairs of every-day life, its power on masses, are the true criteria for judging of its universality.....In Islam is joined a lofty idealism with the most rationalistic practicality. It did not ignore human nature, it never

entangled itself in the tortuous pathways which lie outside the domain of the actual and the real. Its object, like that of other systems, was the elevation of humanity towards the absolute ideal of perfection, but it attained or tries to attain this object by grasping the truth, that the nature of man is, in this existence, imperfect.” (p.278).

These are some of the chief reasons, practical and speculative, that have induced me to accept Islam in preference to the other great religions of the world. There are also the reasons which have always appealed strongly in favour of Islam to some of the greatest minds of Europe in the past as well as in the present. It would be quite out of place here to allude even en passant to what Voltaire, Goethe, Gibbon in the 18th, and a host of great men in the 19th century have said about Islam. All that is possible to do in a lecture like this is to make a passing allusion to a few Europeans of the present day, who have expressed their sympathy and admiration for the faith of Islam.

Not long ago, we all read of a distinguished English nobleman (Lord Stanley of Alderley) who is reputed to have declared before his death that he had all his life been a Muslim! I can assure you, that there are hundreds and thousands all over Europe and America, who would do exactly the same, if they had the requisite moral courage to brave the social and other disadvantages attending on such a step. It

was not less a man and a savant than Ernst Renan who has said the following in his famous lecture on "*L' Islamisme and la science*" (p.19):- "*Je ne suis jamais entré dans une mosquée sans une vive emotion, le dirai-je? sans un certain regret de n'être pas un Mussulman!*" that is to say, "I have never been inside a mosque without feeling a strong emotion, shall I confess it? Without a certain amount of regret that I am not a Muslim"! When a great scholar and great sceptic like Ernst Renan could make a declaration like that, what of humbler persons and individuals—what about the ordinary unlettered people of the world? Since it is well-known that Islam, owing to its simplicity, intelligibility and practicality, is specially suited for the masses of mankind and that it is with the masses that it always had its most signal success and achieved its greatest triumphs, the Rev. Marcus Dodd, D.D. in his book on "Muhammad, Buddha and Christ" has stated the following about the same: "The extreme simplicity of the creed of Islam greatly favoured its rapid propagation. No elaborate explanations were required to teach the ignorant....The rude Negro could understand it on its first recital....It demanded no long novitiate....it was a creed for which the human mind has an instinctive affinity, and which has never roused abhorrence even in the mind of a polytheist. To men who had begun to despair of finding the truth amidst the bewildering subtleties

of a metaphysical theology, it was a relief to find themselves face to face with a simple creed and to be compelled to believe it.” (pp.100-7)

Hence, I feel sure, that if a comprehensive Islamic mission were started in Hyderabad (or any other central place) to preach the simple and sublime truths of Islam to the people of Europe, America and Japan, there would be such a rapid and enormous accession to its ranks as had not been witnessed again ever since the first centuries of the Hijra. You all know the good work which Abdulla W.H. Quilliam has been doing for several years in Liverpool. Besides winning actual converts whose number runs up to some two hundred in all, he has rendered valuable service to the Muslim world by his books and pamphlets which have dissipated prejudices and awakened a lively interest in Islam all over the civilised world. Some of his pamphlets are widely read all over India and Burma, and have, I believe, been translated into Burmese, Hindustani, Persian and Arabic. Don't you feel that it is your bounden duty to strengthen his hands as much you are able to do, and to help him to disseminate the faith of Islam in Europe as he has been doing with such signal success for so many years? Will you, therefore, organise a grand central Islamic Mission here in Hyderabad and open branches in Europe, America and in Japan? God's choicest blessings will descend on Hyderabad, and

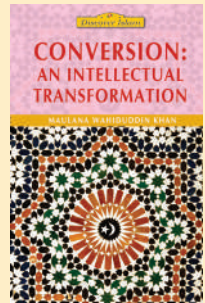
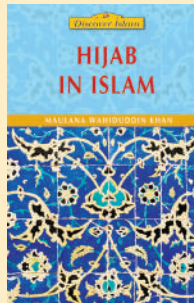
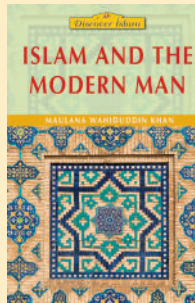
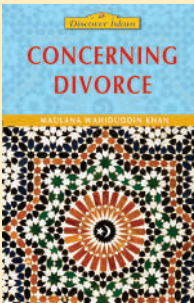
especially on the Head of its beloved and beneficent Ruler: Mir Mahboob Ali Khan, His Highness the Nizam of Hyderabad!

It has been well said, that our choice even in the most exalted matters often proceeds from mixed motives. Shall I tell you what further subconscious motive or reason has had its influence in deciding my choice of Islam? It is this: *To consecrate for the remainder of my earthly days what gifts God has given me and what knowledge and capacity I have acquired, either in Europe or in Asia, from books as well as from travels, to the service of that great community to which I have now the privilege to belong.* Will you then accept me as a brother, as a friend and as a servant? Allow me now to finish this lecture of mine that has already taxed your patience longer than I had intended, with the following verse from the Holy Quran:

Say: "My Lord has guided me to a straight path, to an upright religion, to the faith of the upright Abraham; for he was not one of those who join gods with God. Say: Verily, my prayers, and my worship, and my life and my death are unto God, Lord of the Worlds. He has no associate, and this I am commanded; and I am the first of those who submit to His will." (6: 161-162)

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